

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 15, 2015

Agenda Item: Bighorn Sheep Transplants – Endorsement

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 30 minutes

Background

Trap and transplant of bighorn sheep is an effective management tool. The removal of sheep assists population control. Transplanted animals can ultimately represent new populations or augment existing ones. Funds from auction licenses are available for transplants with all animals receiving a health assessment at capture. The potential new releases below are presented for endorsement by the F&W Commission. Any final Commission endorsement for the new transplant would come after additional formal public review to include an environmental assessment. Augmentations of existing populations and sheep captures from source populations may take place with the Commission's endorsement. These types of management actions and associated process are consistent with the Montana Bighorn Sheep Conservation Strategy.

FWP is seeking endorsement for a potential transplant from Wildhorse Island to Thompson Falls (hunting district 121). This is a potential transplant for the winter of 2015-16 and whether or not it would be done depends on: (1) a health assessment of the Thompson Falls herd, (2) a count of the Wildhorse Island herd, and (3) the stage of completion of highway work near Thompson Falls. The Thompson Falls herd has suffered substantial mortality from vehicles and FWP may or may not choose not to augment this herd depending on the status of ongoing highway work and fencing and the necessity of moving sheep from Wildhorse Island because of overpopulation.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Formal public comment would run through 5 p.m. May 15. Any final adoption will take place at the Commission meeting in June.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

The proposed transplant would serve to both reduce sheep on Wildhorse Island (if that needs to be done), and augment the Thompson Falls herd (if the timing is right).

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission endorse a potential transplant of bighorn sheep from Wildhorse Island to Thompson Falls as recommended by FWP.